United Nations A/66/PV.45

General Assembly

Sixty-sixth session

Official Records

45th plenary meeting
Monday, 31 October 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take the opportunity to pay my respects at the death of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia. It was with profound sadness and heartfelt grief that we learned of the passing of His Royal Highness.

His Royal Highness played a significant role in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and throughout the Arab and Muslim world. His Highness was greatly respected around the world for his vision, his wisdom and his statesmanship. On my own behalf and on behalf of the Member States of the United Nations, I would like to extend my sincere condolences to the royal family and to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia.

Agenda item 27

Social development

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Meeting devoted to the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Members will recall that in its resolution 64/136 of 18 December 2009, the Assembly proclaimed the year 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives and encouraged all Member States, as well as the United Nations and all other relevant stakeholders, to take advantage of the Year as a way of promoting cooperatives and raising awareness of their contribution to social and economic development.

Also, by its resolution 65/184 of 21 December 2010, the Assembly decided to convene, at its sixty-sixth session, one plenary meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012.

Today, we are launching the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives, based on the theme "Cooperative enterprises build a better world". We come together to mark this important year because we recognize that people must be at the centre of the social and economic development agenda. No country can develop unless the people themselves are developed. Enterprises organized on the cooperative principles of self-help, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity contribute immensely to this approach. They reduce poverty, create jobs and promote social integration. And they do so in the firm belief in the ethical values of openness, honesty, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperative movements have existed in many countries over the past 150 years, and today they play a pivotal role in advancing the United Nations development plan, including in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly, Member States have repeatedly recognized the special character of the cooperative movement. The need for successful relationships between cooperatives and the public

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

11-57174 (E)

Please recycle

sector is evident in the commitments made and strategies adopted at the major United Nations conferences and summits.

At today's launch, we will focus our deliberations on the achievements of cooperatives. We will discuss how to advance our support for their objectives of bringing people together to collectively resolve societal problems at the grass-roots level.

Cooperatives offer a member-owned model of economic organizations that strive to meet the economic needs of members. The cooperative movement is also a catalytic force essential to meeting the global economic and employment challenges of a highly competitive global marketplace. Cooperatives play a mediating role in reconciling the logic of the market economy with the imperatives of social inclusion and ownership. That is particularly relevant and important in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis.

Cooperative enterprises are a means to revitalize disadvantaged communities without creating dependency. Cooperatives with operations in nearly all socio-economic sectors provide opportunities for dignified and productive employment. Cooperative enterprises empower whole communities and provide special support to disenfranchised groups, such as the disabled, women and youth.

By virtue of their organizational characteristics, cooperative enterprises are user-owned and community-responsive. They continue to aggregate economic power, thereby enabling communities to compete successfully in the global marketplace. In addition to providing affordable financial services to poor and low-income people, cooperatives have been instrumental in providing business assistance, managerial guidance, equipment and training to people in need.

Cooperatives contribute to food security, rural development and other social services. They not only provide productive employment opportunities to marginalized groups — including women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous peoples — but also make a valuable contribution through the technical assistance programmes of their human resources development component.

The critical role played by cooperatives in the sphere of global peace and security, particularly in peacebuilding, has helped to rebuild post-conflict areas through the prompt provision of essential financial services. Through their networks and federations, cooperatives have provided critical opportunities for people to connect and to work together to meet common goals. Moreover, cooperatives provide developing countries with opportunities to promote their exports and receive fair returns by strengthening linkages with cooperative international business networks.

In today's global economic climate, cooperatives are more important than ever, given their vital contribution to the achievement of global and national development goals. Cooperatives therefore deserve more support and encouragement. It is imperative for Member States and their partners to ensure that the appropriate legal and enabling environment is in place for cooperatives to thrive in their respective countries. We need to strengthen the linkages among cooperatives across the globe, improve statistics and the dissemination of information and enhance our support to technical assistance within cooperative movements.

Together, in partnership with Governments, cooperatives, civil society organizations and the United Nations system, let us commit to promoting sustainable development and global prosperity, including, inter alia, by strengthening cooperatives.

As the Assembly is aware, I designated sustainable development and global prosperity as one of my key pillars for the current session. I look forward to working with all Members to make progress on that issue as a means to ensure a brighter future for all. I look forward to a productive discussion.

(spoke in English)

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Today, we launch the International Year of Cooperatives. We do this as the world is witnessing growing discontent over the ongoing effects of the financial and economic crisis. Increasingly, we see demands for change in the ways we live and work. Increasingly, we see the need for choices and values that are sustainable, responsible and inclusive.

In confronting those challenges, we can draw strength from the cooperative spirit. The cooperative movement balances both economic viability and social

responsibility. Cooperatives make enormous contributions, not only to their members, but also to their communities and societies. They help to reduce poverty and create jobs. They promote food security and inclusive finance. They empower youth, women, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Hence, they serve as a significant social safety net.

The International Year of Cooperatives is an opportunity to raise public awareness about cooperatives, to promote their formation and to encourage Governments to establish policies conducive to their growth. Just as important, it offers a chance to underscore the importance of cooperative values.

One of those values is sustainability. Cooperatives focus on the long-term. Through their use of local labour and capital, as well as their respect for the environment, cooperatives strengthen local economies while creating a sustainable future.

Another cooperative value is solidarity. Cooperatives typically enjoy a strong community connection and hold themselves accountable to more than solely their members or clients. For cooperatives, the well-being of the broader community is as crucial as the well-being of its members.

A third signature value of cooperatives is inclusiveness. As self-help organizations, cooperatives are inherently people-centred. They meet not only material needs but also the human need to participate proactively in improving one's life. Moreover, with democratic decision-making processes and a focus on cultivating member skills and capacities, cooperatives offer a model for harnessing the energies and passions of all.

The International Year of Cooperatives coincides with the observance of the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All and with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held next June. Let us make the most of this confluence of events. Cooperatives present us with values and structures that are ideally suited for addressing the challenges we face. We must leverage these advantages not only to produce better businesses but to advance the broader imperative of sustainable development. In that way, we can live up to the Year's theme, "Cooperative enterprises build a better world".

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement.

In accordance with resolution 65/184, I now give the floor to Dame Pauline Green, cooperative representative, to present the outcome statement of this morning's informal round table.

Dame Pauline Green: Please allow me to welcome my colleagues from the cooperative movement who have come from all around the world — indeed from 52 countries — to be here on this important day for our movement.

> "Cooperatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility."

In those few the words, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon encapsulated the cooperative model of business and the capacity it has, in the words of the United Nations slogan for this International Year, to build a better world.

A background paper for the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development stated that "cooperatives contribute directly to improve the standards of living of half the world's population". Those are words built upon facts. They reflect the fact that for nearly 200 years, cooperatives have been creating jobs across the world. Currently more than 100 million of the world's citizens are employed within a cooperative. They reflect the fact that, since their inception, cooperatives have not sought to ape their corporate competitors and maximize their profits, but rather to meet the needs of their member-owners.

It is no wonder then that today the cooperative movement is owned by nearly 1 billion people across the globe. That number reflects the fact that cooperatives have been a powerful player in embedding civil society across the world through the powerful medium of the creation of member-owned businesses. Those are businesses built on the principles of sound democracy, a commitment to an economic return to members on their trade with the cooperative rather than the size of their share-holding and a model whereby businesses have a wider social engagement as a core part of their DNA.

For nearly two centuries we have been helping to reduce conflict, build community cohesion, build skills and expertise, develop local leadership potential and support women in positions of economic activity and

leadership in their communities. All of those achievements have been developed with the intellectual underpinning of the value of collective endeavour in sustainable, member-owned local enterprises.

In effect, cooperatives have taken millions out of poverty with dignity, by helping them to build their own cooperative enterprises. Our commitment to our democratic and social agenda is built on a sound and successful member-owned business model. What is more, it is a business model that can compete successfully in the marketplace with other forms of business, and thrive.

Today, as the General Assembly launches the International Year of Cooperatives, the International Cooperative Alliance publishes its Global 300 — the list of the largest 300 of our many hundreds of thousands of cooperatives across the world. Together, those 300 cooperatives are worth $1.6 trillion, equivalent to the ninth-largest economy in the world, and they operate in some of the most competitive industries in the world — banking, insurance, agriculture, retail, health, utilities and others. The 300 list includes cooperatives from 25 different countries.

Our challenge is to make sure that more people in decisions-making positions, or those who exercise influence in the political or economic spheres, or indeed in the media, know about the size, scope and scale of the cooperative sector of the economy, the work it does to sustain and build communities across the world and its capacity to do so much more. That was one of the first messages coming this morning from the round table that was held here in this building.

The collapse of the financial sector of the global economy has had tragic results for families and communities in many parts of the developed world in particular. It is well documented now, not least by the International Labour Organization, that there is one part of the financial sector that has continued to grow its asset base over the past four years, where account holders and deposits have grown and which has continued to lend and indeed grown its lending to families and businesses — the cooperative financial institutions, of course.

Cooperatives are people-based businesses and, unlike their competitors, are not constitutionally bound to work to maximize profits for their shareholders. That point was made very strongly here this morning by the speakers at round table on the theme "Cooperative enterprises build a better world: contributions to sustainable development". Each of the contributors made a compelling case that the success, longevity and growth of their cooperative depend on a strong and abiding relationship with their member-owners, and on their trust and confidence in the priorities of the business that they own, in which they can play a significant role and in which, together, they are the key stakeholder. That is the same whether the cooperative is one of the earliest forms of cooperatives — banking, retail, insurance or agriculture — or whether it is one of the leading-edge, radical new community coops in the developed world, or a crucial small-village savings and credit coop in Africa.

What was also significant from the speakers this morning was the way in which they had a common case to make, from Mondragón in the Basque country of Spain, to Rabobank in the Netherlands, to the supply and marketing cooperatives in China. Each of them showed that regardless of size, each has a clear and continuing commitment to international development and is actively engaged in what they consider one of the commitments that comes with being a cooperative.

That work, however, would be much easier — and much more productive — if the cooperative model of business were taken more seriously and if all contributors used their own experience to make the case for three key points. First, member-owned cooperatives are a serious business model, with scale. Cooperatives are therefore asking that the specific and unique legal and financial framework of a cooperative be fully acknowledged and recognized in public policy and regulation.

Secondly, member-owned cooperatives are values-led businesses. Our values are integral to our business model, not just a marketing tool in the shape of a corporate social responsibility report once a year. They define our identity and our brand; they are part of our DNA. Cooperatives are asking that their model of business be given equal promotion with the stockholder model.

Thirdly, our governance model is people-led. At a time when people — especially young people, whom this recession is hitting so cruelly — are cynical about the political and economic models that dominate their

lives, when they are looking for a voice, in North Africa, the Middle East, Wall Street and across the world, and when they are looking for impact, the cooperative is not only an effective governance model, it is a compelling one. And cooperatives are asking that there should be greater diversification of the global economy to ensure a level playing field for the member-owned model of business.

Let me conclude by saying that our movement — because that is what it is, a movement — is conscious of the great gift that the United Nations has given us with this International Year: a gift that recognizes the cooperative impact on the socio-economic development of the world, and its capacity to do so much more. We wish to put on record our particular thanks to the Government of Mongolia, which put the original proposal for the Year on the agenda, and to the unprecedentedly large number of Governments that put their signature on the resolution to give effect to the Year.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to ascend the rostrum in this iconic Chamber. I am proud to do so in the name of the 1 billion cooperators across the world. I pay tribute to the great work that they do across the world to make it a better place. Together, cooperatives will work to make the International Year a powerful restatement of the cooperative ideal. It is our aim that, on 31 December 2012, we will be able to pivot from a successful International Year of Cooperatives to a decade of cooperative growth.

The President: As indicated in my letter of 21 October, an invitation has been extended to Mr. Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to make a statement at this meeting. If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly agrees to hear the statement by Mr. Brown.

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brown: First of all, let me say that I want to speak up for the 100 million employees of the cooperative movement, represented by 300 representatives here today from 52 countries. I would like to thank them for showing that the principles of human cooperation can make for a better global economy. I also want to speak out today on behalf of the 1 billion members of cooperatives worldwide, all of them affiliated with the International Cooperative Alliance, and to thank them for living their lives in the spirit of cooperation and public service.

I also want to stand up today for the half of the world's population who, either in buying from a cooperative or as part of a mutual association, know that the principles of cooperation — less poverty and greater equality — make for a better society in every part of the world. For literally billions of us are part of a movement across the generations of people who, however distantly, feel the pain of others. We are part of a movement of men and women who believe in something bigger than just ourselves. We are part of families and communities who believe in something quite monumental: that when the strong help the weak, it makes us all stronger. Let us therefore remember today, in this year of cooperation, that our interdependence, our mutual dependence on each another, is an ever-increasing fact of our lives. As Martin Luther King, Jr. — who is now commemorated in the pantheon of Washington, D.C. — said that we are part of an inescapable network of mutuality.

I remember the poetry that says it is the hands of others who grow the food we eat, who sew the clothes we wear, who build the houses we inhabit. It is the hands of others who tend us when we are sick and who lift us up when we fall. It is the hands of others who bring us into this world and who lower us into the grave. We are finding today that not only are we mutually dependent on one another for our survival and subsistence and success, but that there are global problems — not just common or shared problems that can be dealt with by bilateral or trilateral or Group of Seven action, but global problems: problems of climate change, of financial stability, pandemics, problems of security needed against terrorism, of inequality that can never be resolved unless there is cooperation between nations.

As this generation has found, if interdependence forces us to cooperate as a fact of life, then acting on that interdependence, which summons us to cooperate, is part of the moral sense of almost every individual we meet. We do more than to cooperate out of need. There is a human need to cooperate. Is it not the case that we cannot be truly happy when others are sad, that we cannot truly feast when others famish? Is it not the case

that we cannot truly be contented or complete as individuals when the lives of millions of other people are incomplete and full of discontent?

So I say that in this International Year of Cooperatives that we must do more than simply talk about our interdependence. We must talk more than simply about the moral sense that cooperation is good. We should from here, at this United Nations meeting today, in this year of cooperation, listen to those voices of discontent, the 200 million people around the world who are unemployed, the 80 million young people without hope that they can ever find a job, the 1.4 billion people who today still live in absolute poverty. We should listen to these voices and set out a cooperative vision for the future. It is not anti-wealth to say that wealth must do more than serve only the needs of the wealthy. It is not anti-enterprise to say that the purpose of enterprise is to support more than just the entrepreneur. And it is not anti-competition to say that without cooperation, competition may not lift us up but may pull us down.

Let me say to the Assembly that nothing would do more to show the principles of cooperation in action than if the world would come together to make a new commitment that by 2015 we will do everything in our power to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Nothing would send a bigger signal about our ability to come together for a common purpose than if we say we will achieve one by one the Millennium Development Goals.

Today I want specifically to talk about the importance of meeting the education Millennium Development Goal by 2015. It is a principle of the cooperative movement that everyone should have the chance of education and training. But today there are 70 million children not going to school; 70 million children denied the most basic of opportunities. I have met children who beg for the chance to get to school when it is denied them because of the failure to provide teachers, classrooms and the technology they need. So as part of the International Year of Cooperatives, let us make this year work for the children of the world by training teachers, building schools and delivering the technology that is needed to provide education in all parts of the world — so that we can genuinely say that we will be the first generation in history to achieve the right of every single child in the world to have the chance of education at school.

Now, in this year of cooperation, let us remember some of the great statements that have been made in support of cooperation over the decades. A few months ago I was asked by Harvard University to record, as part of a project, one of the great phrases from a speech by John F. Kennedy, his inaugural address to the American people in 1961. They asked people from every part of the world to contribute a recording of a sentence from that speech, so that they could make a compilation of his remarks during his famous inaugural address that could be sent around the world in remembrance of his historic words. Some Assembly Members will know those great words, because they are relevant to what we are talking about today.

"The torch has been passed to a new generation" and, yes, there is a new generation of cooperators emerging, as the cooperative movement goes from strength to strength. "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country" is the call to public service that lies at the heart of the cooperative movement. "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate." That is the call to seek cooperation where possible and never to seek confrontation for its own sake. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." That is a call for cooperation to ensure that our environmental resources and income and wealth are shared fairly around the world.

It is said that Richard Nixon, who was the defeated presidential candidate in 1961, was asked which of the words from Kennedy's inaugural address he would have liked to have read out. He said that there was only one phrase: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States of America". However, the words that I was asked to read, which I want to repeat to the Assembly today, were "Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us." We have it in our mortal hands to abolish poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy and conflict.

Kennedy later went on to Philadelphia, where he declared that, if 1776 had brought America a declaration of independence, it was now time for a declaration of interdependence. That is, I think, our destiny — an interdependent world ready to challenge the global problems that exist and prepared to cooperate for common purposes. That is why this International Year of Cooperatives is important. That is

why so many people around the world will celebrate the principles of cooperation.

That is why, as Dame Pauline Green said so eloquently, we must now move on from a year of cooperation to declare a decade of cooperation, where people around the world will benefit from jobs, relief from poverty, a higher quality of life and environmental sustainability as a result of not only the efforts and endeavours, but also the ambitions and ideals, of cooperators everywhere.

The President: I thank the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for his statement.

Mr. Bayarmagnai (Mongolia): On behalf of the Government of Mongolia, it is a great honour and privilege to address the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session in the plenary meeting on the launching of the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives. I wish to extend my delegation's warmest greetings to all participants in this important gathering.

The delegation of Mongolia is particularly pleased to highlight the fact that the launching of the International Year of Cooperatives coincides with the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Mongolia's membership in the United Nations.

Cooperatives, as economic enterprises and as autonomous self-help organizations, play an important role in fostering inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, poverty reduction, employment generation and food security. They represent a model of economic enterprise which, when effectively implemented, promotes democratic and human values and environmental sustainability.

Cooperatives also promote social integration and cohesion, as they are a means of empowering the poor and marginalized groups. The cooperative sector, especially in developing countries, contributes to efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In recognition of the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development throughout the world and to further strengthen cooperatives worldwide, the United Nations declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

Since its accession to the United Nations as a full-fledged Member State 50 years ago, Mongolia has been endeavouring to contribute to the common efforts of the international community by introducing a number of United Nations resolutions on important subjects, including on cooperatives in social development.

The International Year of Cooperatives seeks to encourage the growth and establishment of cooperatives world-wide. Strengthening cooperatives requires long-term efforts. Hence, the development of a road map or plan of action has been proposed to ensure the continued promotion of cooperatives and effective follow-up to the activities envisaged beyond the International Year of Cooperatives.

To help achieve those objectives, an expert group meeting on the theme "Cooperatives in social development: beyond 2012" was held in Ulaanbaatar from 3 to 6 May. The meeting was organized jointly by the Government of Mongolia, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry, and the United Nations, represented by the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Participants in the expert group meeting discussed the programme of activities for the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives and inputs for a draft plan of action beyond 2012.

In line with resolution 65/184 on cooperatives in social development, which invited Member States to consider taking action towards establishing national mechanisms, such as national committees, to prepare for, observe and follow up on the International Year of Cooperatives, the Government of Mongolia, by its resolution 112 of April 2011, has established a national committee to prepare for the International Year of Cooperatives. The Committee is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and represented by the relevant ministries as well as the representatives of cooperatives. The national committee has approved a plan of action to observe the International Year of Cooperatives. The plan envisages implementing a broad range of activities aimed at raising public awareness about cooperatives and their contribution to socio-economic development; promoting the formation and growth of cooperatives; establishing a legal environment conducive to the formation, growth and stability of cooperatives; organizing a campaign under the slogan "One province — two brands" and exhibitions with the broad involvement of cooperatives; and strengthening cooperation with the International Cooperative Alliance through project implementation.

The history of the cooperative movement in Mongolia dates back to the 1920s. However, it underwent a profound transformation in the 1990s, when Mongolia began its transition to a market economy.

The adoption of the Cooperative Law in 1998 and the National Programme for Cooperative Development, one year later, played a crucial role in creating a favourable environment for the formation and development of cooperatives. Mongolian cooperatives today represent the autonomous association of people united voluntarily to meet their common needs and aspirations through jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises. They play an important role in socio-economic development by creating jobs and thus alleviating poverty. They have grown in number and in the services they provide. There are currently 2400 cooperatives successfully operating in such varied areas as the processing of raw materials, production, savings and credit, sale, supply and procurement, service, and housing construction.

Mongolia's economic growth and sustainable development, including food security, depend heavily on the agricultural sector. Special attention is therefore accorded to the development of agricultural cooperatives. More than 37 per cent of our population lives in rural areas and most are engaged in animal husbandry. Agricultural cooperatives play an important role in supporting small agricultural producers and marginalized groups such as young people and women. In that context, we welcome the initiative of the International Co-operative Alliance to celebrate the International Day of Cooperatives 2011 with the theme "Youth: the future of cooperative enterprise".

In conclusion, I wish to express my Government's strong support for the development of cooperatives world-wide.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): New Zealand joins you, Mr. President, in expressing its condolences on the death of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. Our sympathy goes to the royal family, to the Government and to the people of Saudi Arabia.

New Zealand welcomes the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives and supports the aim of promoting cooperatives and raising awareness of their contribution to social and economic development.

Compared with other countries, cooperatives serve a relatively large part of the New Zealand economy. Cooperatives operate in many of our business sectors, most notably in agriculture, but also in areas such as banking, financial services and retailing.

The earliest record of a New Zealand cooperative dates back to 1871, with the formation of the Otago Cooperative Cheese Company. Just eight dairy farmers purchased shares based on the quantity of milk they would supply to the cooperative, with each share having a value of £1, and representing the supply of ten quarts of milk. The general principles adopted by that cooperative were typical of those that have prevailed in cooperative societies and companies through to the present time. According to the Bloomberg business news service, New Zealand's largest business, Fonterra Cooperative Group Limited, is "the world's largest dairy exporter" and "accounts for about 40 per cent of the global trade in butter, milk powder and cheese, selling products in 140 countries". That, to quote International Co-operative Alliance President Dame Pauline Green, is "a serious business model with scale".

The scale and diversity of New Zealand's cooperative sector means that cooperatives play a key role in contributing to the achievement of the Government's economic objectives.

The values on which cooperatives are based, as expressed by the International Co-operative Alliance, are those of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Those values are demonstrated in New Zealand's cooperative businesses, with their commitment to social and environmental goals. Cooperatives have played a significant role in the development of New Zealand communities, promoting qualities of independence and cooperation, and responding well to the needs of their communities.

New Zealand recognizes the importance of providing an enabling environment for the establishment and operation of cooperatives. A legal framework that facilitates the establishment and operation of cooperatives has existed for well over a century and is, at present, largely embodied in the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1908 and the Co-operative Companies Act of 1996. That legislation contains special features relating to shareholdings that

facilitate the conduct of business on a mutual basis and encourage continuous active participation by members of the cooperative. That legal framework provides the flexibility needed for cooperative enterprises to prosper and establishes structures that respond to the needs of cooperative members.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Relevant Government websites promote awareness of the cooperative form and offer advice on how to register as a cooperative, thus enabling those who search online for information regarding New Zealand's regulatory requirements to consider whether the cooperative business model is appropriate to their particular circumstances.

Internationally, New Zealand's Aid Programme also recognizes that, under the appropriate circumstances, cooperatives in their various forms can promote economic and social development and contribute to the eradication of poverty. The Programme works with and accommodates different types of cooperative as found in different countries, including the association of pearl businesses in the Cook Islands and tourism associations in Samoa. New Zealand will play its part during the International Year of Cooperatives, with the New Zealand Cooperatives Association coordinating the New Zealand programme. Our planned involvement includes a cooperative research conference in June 2012, focused on the development of education programmes for professionals, such as lawyers and accountants, along with other public events.

Also, as part of its contribution to the International Year of Cooperatives, the Government has agreed to fund a statistical project that aims to estimate the contribution made by New Zealand cooperatives to the country's gross domestic product and employment. The resulting statistics will provide a basis for measuring the extent of cooperative activity, and will provide better information for future policy development.

Mr. Mikkonen (Finland): It is an honour for me to address this meeting as a representative of Finland and Chairman of the Finnish Cooperative Council. The cooperative organizations in Finland welcome the United Nations initiative to declare 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. We believe that cooperatives can impact poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration. Cooperatives bring many benefits to society. Farmers can gain better access to markets by working together in cooperatives, consumers can buy their goods more cheaply in their own cooperative stores, and micro-credits given by local cooperatives can revive local economies.

Cooperation as a business model and enterprise form has proved to be successful in several developed countries, and Finland is often considered to be the most cooperative country in the world. Almost half of all daily goods are bought from cooperative stores; more than one third of all deposits are in cooperative banks; and the Finnish agricultural cooperatives have high shares of the Nordic market. For instance, more than 95 per cent of the milk produced in Finland is delivered to cooperative dairies. About 80 per cent of the adult population are members of cooperatives.

However, even in Finland, a very cooperative country, the cooperative model is still relatively unknown among the public. We are working tirelessly to make the cooperative model better known, and we have also achieved many good results throughout the years.

Today cooperatives are used as a tool for training in entrepreneurship in Finnish colleges. This educational programme, where students form, run and develop cooperatives for the marketing of their skills, has proved very successful. The programme has also been exported to colleges and universities in several other European countries.

In Finland, the cooperative business is exactly that: business — very pragmatic and very non-ideological. About 20 years ago, in the early 1990s, we started a project with the aim of promoting the formation of cooperatives in Finland. Finland experienced a difficult recession at that time, and we saw cooperation as a tool for solving many of the resulting problems. Forming cooperatives could provide services that municipalities have cut down on. Cooperation could be a tool for self-employment for the jobless and offer the possibility of developing the whole third sector area. The number of cooperatives in Finland has quadrupled since 1990.

I would like to conclude by once again emphasizing the potential value of the cooperative model in bringing about social and economic development in societies. Cooperatives can play a key

role in fighting poverty, creating employment and enhancing social integration.

Mr. Sinah (India): I am thankful to you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to address the General Assembly. It is indeed an honour for me.

As we gather here to mark 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, it is most befitting that the United Nations is taking the lead in raising awareness about cooperatives as a progressive model of socio-economic advancement. Considering the role that cooperatives have played the world over in bringing about social change, rural development and raising economic productivity, this global recognition is long overdue.

The cooperative model of development has met with remarkable success in varied socio-economic contexts in both developed and developing nations. Yet its true potential as a means of socio-economic organization remains to be fully harnessed, and the model itself to be better understood by the larger global development community. Its space in global development discourse thus far has been limited. In fact, the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), have not really focused on this people-centric development option.

They say that in every crisis lies an opportunity. There is a strengthened push for financial inclusion, promoting social protection and empowering small and medium enterprises and marginal farmers to act as levers against economic shocks. This has put forth cooperatives as a viable choice for social and economic action. We must fully capitalize on the situation.

India calls upon Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector to strongly advocate for the cooperative movement. This would be most timely, as the global community prepares to renew its commitment to sustainable development next year at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

The decentralized nature of the cooperative structure, based on popular participation and a bottom-up approach, makes it an ideal platform for local action. Cooperatives have contributed significantly to ensuring economic productivity and rural development; promoting social empowerment and cohesion; opening marketing channels for village and artisanal produce; and providing credit and input support to farmers, consumers and workers. Their catalytic role in national advancement, in both developed and developing countries, has been well recognized.

India's experience with cooperatives has been singularly successful. This has been duly noted by the Secretary-General in his report. Given that almost 70 per cent of our people are dependent on agriculture, it is natural for our cooperative movement to have an agricultural bias, both in credit and non-credit segments. Our national priority for poverty eradication, inclusive growth, women's empowerment and promoting self-reliance underpins the fundamentals of the Indian cooperative movement. In the process, we have constantly drawn inspiration from the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who desired to see village societies and cooperative farming at the centre of his idea of Gram Swaraj, or rural independence.

A unique feature of the cooperative movement in India is that the State has played an active role in it. We believe that such responsibilities are part of those of a developing State, especially in the early years of its existence. With the cooperative movement having gathered strength of its own, the Government is now largely playing a facilitator's role.

Cooperatives have been the lifeline of India's white revolution, or milk production, and have made us the largest producer of milk in the world. Milk cooperatives have been most successful in the dry parts of India, not the most ideal setting for dairy, making cooperative action even more noteworthy. The milk cooperative Anand Milk Union Limited (AMUL) is a household name in India, with its products available throughout the length and breadth of the country. Behind the AMUL brand stands a milk marketing federation, a union of 15,712 village milk cooperatives comprising 3 million milk producers, with a daily milk collection of 12 million litres and supported by 1 million retailers. In our State of Bihar, the milk cooperative under the brand name Sudha has made a significant contribution to ensuring healthy, nutritious and affordable food for the people of the great region of Bihar, the land of Lord Gupta.

The Indian Farmers' Fertilizer Cooperative Limited, the largest fertilizer-producing cooperative in Asia, is another stellar example of cooperative success in India. It has a membership base of more than 39,000 agricultural cooperatives throughout the country. It has

recently diversified to include insurance, information technology services and other developmental activities in rural areas, establishing new networks of group action to empower people.

There are a large number of other such success stories from the cooperative sector in India. Our cooperatives have shown impressive results in banking, sugar-cane farming, urban housing, fishery, poultry, home-based economic activities, the marketing of village produce and social welfare. India's cooperative action in providing affordable housing in the urban areas has been instrumental in making progress on slum development, an MDG commitment.

Given India's success in cooperatives, we have taken steps to integrate them fully into our planning and development process. We have established the National Cooperative Union of India, an apex body to guide and strengthen the movement. To support its growth and professional needs, we have established a network of cooperative management institutes. In order to improve the functioning of cooperatives, we are placing greater emphasis on consolidation and internal resource mobilization, meeting their training needs and reorienting the role of Government as a facilitator.

We live in uncertain times. New and emerging challenges of food security, energy access, the rapid pace of urbanization, the degeneration of natural resources and growing rural-urban inequality require enhanced collective action. We are compelled to do more with fewer resources. How do we do it? One of the answers lies in the cooperative movement. Let us do our best to protect, project and promote it.

Mr. De Antueno (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): For Argentina, the promotion of cooperatives and an interdependent economy is a State policy. It thus fosters fair sustainable development, in which inclusion and social integration are the result of its direct action. Its potential to transform facilitates the implementation of new economic structures that make the economy more democratic to the benefit of the people and society.

Likewise, cooperatives help to eliminate poverty and to create employment through the production of high value-added goods and services and the participation of vulnerable social sectors. The national Government supports cooperatives through training and financial assistance, the development of programmes that help to increase their capacity, and the creation of a regulatory framework conducive to setting up and promoting such associations. In Argentina, cooperatives generate more than 50,000 jobs, contributing to more than 9 per cent of the gross domestic product. Currently, there are more than 14 million people working in more than 30,000 cooperatives and mutual associations. As unionized institutions and economies, democratically managed by their members, cooperatives are one of the fundamental pillars of the most important process of social inclusion in modern-day Argentina by fostering values of solidarity and cooperation.

That transformation can be seen in the increasing social inclusion. Depending on their sector of activity, cooperatives are the heart of our leap to efficient productivity. That can be seen in the percentages per sector: manufacturing 35 per cent, public services 16 per cent, farming 12 per cent, credit and financial assistance 6.7 per cent, among other areas.

We therefore welcome the initiative to declare 2012 International Year of Cooperatives. We hope that actions undertaken in that context contribute to its recognition as a promoter of the broadest participation of all people in economic development and that it encourages all States to take concrete measures towards its development and strengthening.

No one can dispute the fact that in today's Argentina, cooperatives are seen as one of the most effective means of demonstrating the economic, social and political power of the unionized economic sector. Together, they help to build a more just, united and inclusive country.

Mrs. Furman (Israel): The delegation of Israel appreciates this opportunity to salute the world cooperative movement. We welcome the General Assembly's decision to declare 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives (resolution 64/136).

The State of Israel was built on the foundation of strong cooperative movements. Cooperatives were a driving force in forging my country's advanced agricultural, industrial and transportation networks. Two of the world's most significant and successful cooperative business models were developed in Israel — the kibbutz and the moshav.

Cooperatives account for more than 90 per cent of agricultural production and 15 per cent of industrial production and industrial exports in Israel today. Israeli

cooperative enterprises are global leaders in the development, production and marketing of technologies that have revolutionized agricultural production, particularly in the area of irrigation. Farmers in every corner of the planet are using Israeli technology, developed in cooperatives, to improve crop yields, irrigate their fields more efficiently, and reduce their carbon footprint.

Israeli cooperatives continue to be at the forefront of social development in Israel. A combination of effective Government investment in basic infrastructure and the development of strong cooperative movements devoted to agricultural production has virtually eliminated rural poverty. Israeli cooperatives have enabled our rural populations to achieve standards of living that rank among the highest of any rural population in the world, while guaranteeing food security for the rest of the country.

Israel's cooperatives are significant drivers of development because they are independent, member-owned business enterprises. They are dedicated to meeting the needs of their members by successfully competing in globalized markets. In doing so, our cooperatives promote community self-reliance, collaboration and cohesion. They have also been at the forefront of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment within Israeli society.

Israel's cooperatives are significant employers. They provide jobs not only for cooperative members but also for hired labourers. All employees receive wages and enjoy working conditions that meet the standards of the decent work agenda of the International Labour Organization. Over the past century, Israel has witnessed first-hand the transformative power of cooperative movements. We know well that cooperative enterprises build a better world.

As we begin to observe the International Year of Cooperatives, the Government of Israel pledges to join others around the world to promote the growth of cooperative frameworks. We salute the International Co-operative Alliance and its member organizations on the eve of the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I would like first of all to thank Mr. Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly, for his initiative in convening this meeting on the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives. I would also like to thank both Dame Pauline Green and Mr. Gordon Brown for their respective inspiring statements.

The philosophy of cooperatives first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in Japan. Since 1900, when the Industrial Cooperative Law was enacted in Japan, agricultural producers, forestry owners, fishermen and consumers alike have organized cooperatives around the country. Recently, cooperatives in Japan have been strengthening their roles in the public sphere, including in fields such as medical care, welfare and child-care assistance, in addition to their traditional roles in economic fields such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and banking.

At the international level, cooperatives in Japan have contributed to sustainable development in developing countries. One example is the development of agricultural cooperation in Asia, where the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia, established in Tokyo in 1963, has been operating with funds raised from agricultural cooperatives in Japan and with the support of the Japanese Government.

The aims of the Institute are to provide training and research services to those associated with the agricultural cooperative movement, with a view to advancing the cooperative movement and thereby promoting socio-economic development, primarily for Asian countries. In collaboration with the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), the Institute organizes various joint training courses, including courses on safety and quality management for agricultural products, the revitalization of local communities by rural women and fostering core leaders of agricultural cooperatives.

The Great East Japan Earthquake in March this year provided an opportunity to renew our belief about the important role that cooperatives can play in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report on cooperatives in social development and implementation of the International Year of Cooperatives (A/66/136). Although cooperatives in the area, especially agricultural and fisheries cooperatives, were severely hit by the calamity, in the spirit of mutual help cooperatives throughout Japan carried out relief activities, providing food, drugs and other necessities, as well as dispatching medical doctors, nurses and volunteers to the devastated areas. We would like to convey our

sincerest gratitude to cooperatives around the world for the warm support they provided to our country through the ICA.

After the General Assembly declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives (resolution 64/136), in August 2010 Japan launched a national planning committee for the International Year of Cooperatives 2012 as a unified national body to pull resources and efforts together in making the Year successful and fruitful. The committee consists of over 100 people from various fields, including cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, academia, consumer organizations, the media and business organizations. The committee aims to increase public awareness of the values and roles of cooperatives and to take measures to further promote the development of cooperatives.

In preparation for the Year, the committee is already working on the creation and distribution of information materials on the International Year of Cooperatives. In 2012, the committee is planning to hold several events in Japan, including an opening event for the Year in January, a central meeting for the International Day of Cooperatives in July and a festival of cooperatives next fall.

In conclusion, we are hopeful that we can promote greater awareness and understanding of cooperatives through the International Year of Cooperatives and of the ways in which cooperatives contribute to sustainable development throughout the international community.

Mr. Schaper (Netherlands): I would like to begin by welcoming this discussion on cooperatives.

The Netherlands has a very strong history when it comes to the cooperative movement. As early as the nineteenth century, groups of farmers and entrepreneurs started organizing themselves to arrange for collective marketing, purchase and procurement of inputs and for collective banking and insurance systems.

Some of our largest companies in the Netherlands are based on the cooperative model. For instance, cooperatives are market leaders in several agricultural subsectors. Examples are the dairy company FrieslandCampina and the flower auction FloraHolland, both leaders in their sector. One of the largest banks in the Netherlands, the cooperative bank Rabobank has its roots in the agricultural sector. This morning at the informal round table, the Chairman of the Board of the Rabobank Group, Mr. Moerland, who is present here today, elaborated on the role of the cooperative bank. For example, it provides inclusive finance and strengthens value chains in the agricultural sector.

On the Government side, three weeks ago our Minister for International Cooperation addressed a conference of chairpersons and directors of cooperative companies in the Netherlands. He emphasized that our agricultural sector in particular, but other sectors as well, have thrived on the cooperative model throughout the years. Indeed, cooperative companies do relatively well in these years of economic turbulence, as they are owned by the farmers and entrepreneurs themselves, and are therefore not exposed to the caprices of shareholders on the stock exchange.

We believe that another very important feature of the cooperative movement is that both large and small entrepreneurs and farmers are members of the same cooperatives, all benefiting from economies of scale — an interesting example, I would say, of inherent inclusiveness.

At the international level, in the context of the Government's policy with respect to food security, the Netherlands supports a programme called Farmers Fighting Poverty. This €50-million programme is meant to strengthen organizations and cooperatives of farming men and women. Through the programme, the Dutch cooperative companies support their partner organizations and cooperatives in developing countries. For instance, The Greenery, a leading international fruit and vegetable supplier, successfully introduced Ugandan horticulturist associations to European buyers. The Dutch cooperative CR Delta assisted Rwandese and Indian farmers in cattle improvement. Employees of FrieslandCampina support local milk-chilling cooperatives in Kenya in the establishment of processing facilities.

The Netherlands did not establish a formal national committee for 2012. We feel strongly that the cooperative companies should take the lead themselves. However, the Government is, of course, in close contact with the national cooperative movement. During the year, several events will be held in the Netherlands to draw attention to the cooperative movement.

To conclude, I would like to re-emphasize that the cooperative model has been a success in our country and that it is our hope that we can support other countries on their road to economic independence by sharing knowledge and experience.

Mr. Srivali (Thailand): At the outset, my delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Mongolian Government, the principal sponsor of the resolutions on cooperatives in social development, as well as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and relevant United Nations specialized agencies for their efforts in coordinating and organizing activities for the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives.

Thailand, a sponsor of the resolutions on the role of cooperatives adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, is pleased to participate in this special plenary meeting to proclaim 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. This meeting presents a unique opportunity for the General Assembly to recognize the contribution of cooperatives to economic and social development, which can contribute to achieving internationally agreed development targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on cooperatives in social development and implementation of the International Year of Cooperatives (A/66/136). We fully concur with the report that cooperatives provide a framework that enables the self-empowerment of the poor and other marginalized groups through community self-reliance, collaboration and cohesion. The cooperative principles of self-help and collective action also promote empowerment and participation, which enable the poor to become active participants in the improvement of their own livelihoods and economic futures.

Thailand has long recognized that cooperatives are important partners in the implementation of the development agenda. As my Foreign Minister recently stated during the general debate (see A/66/PV.28), Thailand firmly believes that sustainable development is a key foundation for durable peace and that the development agenda must be people-centred. In keeping with that policy and its sustainable implementation, Thailand reiterates its firm belief that community-level ownership must be promoted and special attention paid to empowering the impoverished and the marginalized. In that light, self-help groups such as cooperatives can provide communities with an economic and social space in which the impoverished and the marginalized can gain access to and become part of the cooperative system, thereby gaining employment, raising income and reducing poverty.

At this meeting, my delegation would like to reaffirm Thailand's continued support to cooperatives and reiterates that Thailand will continue to encourage and facilitate their establishment and development. The Royal Thai Government's macroeconomic policy on cooperatives has always been clear. We have worked to enhance the capacity of our cooperatives as part of efforts to promote, support and protect them and preserve their autonomy, in accordance with our Constitution. The Royal Thai Government has been working in an integrated way with stakeholders to find ways to achieve that goal. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, which is mandated to promote and develop the cooperative system in Thailand, is a prime example of my country's commitment in that regard.

As we draw nearer to the year 2015, our hopes of achieving the Millennium Development Goals will need our renewed attention and enhanced collective efforts. We will need to enlist help from all actors and promote greater public participation, especially of the impoverished and the marginalized, in order to achieve our development targets in a sustainable manner and look beyond 2015. Thailand firmly believes that cooperatives can contribute to achieving that goal. We therefore urge all Member States to take this unique opportunity to rediscover cooperatives as important partners in our development agenda in 2012 and beyond.

Mr. Quintaes (Brazil): Brazil welcomes this special meeting devoted to the official launch of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012. The Brazilian Mission is very pleased to participate in today's meeting and commends the excellent statements that have been made on this important issue.

Allow me at the outset to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for presenting his report on cooperatives in social development and implementation of the International Year of Cooperatives (A/66/136). I would also like to pay tribute to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and to the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives for their excellent work in preparation for this International Year and its events.

In their early years, cooperatives were seen as an alternative by those who were excluded from the formal labour market during particularly difficult economic times. Now, however, cooperatives are present in all countries, in a variety of sectors ranging from agriculture to financial services. They are increasingly responsible for an important part of economic growth and income generation, especially in the fastest-rising economies of the world. In developing countries, given their particularities and democratic nature, cooperatives have proven to be a particularly effective economic activity, a viable alternative for attaining sustainable development and an essential contribution to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, mainly the Millennium Development Goals.

Cooperatives can be traced back to the early stages of Brazilian history. Our long and successful experience with cooperatives provides a good example of how local capacities can be harnessed when the adequate legal frameworks and public policies are put in place to foster the creation and development of cooperative enterprises.

Today, Brazilian cooperatives are responsible for a significant part of gross domestic product growth and have a considerable level of participation in the economy, especially in the agricultural and microfinance sectors. They also show impressive results in creating jobs, distributing income and facilitating more equitable participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

Cooperatives are also playing a critical role in achieving and ensuring food security. Through the Brazil Without Poverty plan launched in June, the Brazilian Government is purchasing corn seeds from agriculturai cooperatives to be distributed to people living in extremely vulnerable situations in rural areas.

Brazil was the first country in Latin America to have a credit union. Today, Brazil ranks thirteenth in the world in the number of financial cooperatives. Cooperatives account for 17 per cent of bank branches in the country and are an important tool for granting access to formal credit and ensuring a more inclusive financial sector so as to benefit populations underserved by traditional commercial institutions.

At the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, Member States committed to utilizing and fully developing the potential and contribution of cooperatives for the attainment of social development goals, in particular the eradication of poverty, the generation of full and productive employment and the enhancement of social integration.

Likewise, International Labour Organization Recommendation No. 193 states that

> "measures should be adopted to promote the potential of cooperatives in all countries, irrespective of their level of development, in order to assist them ... to create and develop income-generating activities ... develop human resource capacities ... strengthen their competitiveness ... and contribute to sustainable human development".

In addition to Government support, the international community, in particular the United Nations system, could take various actions to assist cooperatives in developing their full potential. The World Food Programme Purchase for Progress initiative provides a good example of a set of actions guided by the spirit of the World Summit for Social Development. Through that initiative, the World Food Programme supports agricultural cooperatives by promoting their participation in food procurement. Other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should consider replicating that experience by facilitating purchases from local cooperatives through in-country programmes, especially in the least developed countries and countries emerging from natural disasters and conflict.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, cooperatives may play an important role in peacebuilding and recovery settings based on common interests, including the promotion of dialogue and economic activities that contribute to social integration and cohesion.

By launching this International Year of Cooperatives, the General Assembly has reinforced the international commitment to supporting and fostering the creation of cooperatives, and has also recognized their invaluable role in improving social and economic well-being through the establishment of a viable, dynamic and distinctive sector of the economy. We believe that the International Year of Cooperatives will help to highlight the importance of establishing adequate legal frameworks and viable financial mechanisms to ensure the sustainability and economic viability of cooperatives.

Mrs. Onwuliri (Nigeria): I wish on behalf of my delegation to commend President Al-Nasser for the effective conduct of the affairs of the General Assembly since the beginning of this session, and to state that I feel highly honoured to have the opportunity to address the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session on this important day of the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012. Please be assured of Nigeria's continued support and cooperation towards the successful conclusion of the session.

Nigeria strongly supports the successful launching this morning of the International Year of Cooperatives, in fulfilment of resolution 65/184. The conclusions of the informal round table discussions held earlier today should serve to build the necessary cooperative and collective efforts to address the socio-economic and political problems confronting humankind in our time.

The launch of the International Year of Cooperatives, following the proclamation of 2012 as the year for promoting and raising awareness of the capacity and capability of cooperatives, is a seminal event. Indeed, it is a milestone that is critically important in addressing the socio-economic well-being and living standards of all peoples, by which I mean the quality and, indeed, the dignity of life.

At a time of global financial crisis, food shortages, fluctuations in fuel supply and environmental degradation, it has become increasingly challenging for the public sector to provide all of the resources and, indeed, to lead all of the initiatives aimed at national socio-economic development. In such circumstances, many nations, especially developing countries, have been compelled to undertake major reforms in order to address a dwindling financial sector and expand the productivity base through partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

The major focus has been on pooling resources across all sectors and comprehensively involving all stakeholders to address key development issues and questions. Therein lie the wisdom of and key factor in the adoption of resolution 65/184, which was designed to raise public awareness on the pivotal role that cooperatives could play in socio-economic development in general, and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in particular. To that end, it is incumbent on every Member State to develop viable national policies and enact national legislation to promote the growth of cooperatives.

Nigeria appreciates the steps being taken by the United Nations system to ensure the success of 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, particularly in the area of agricultural and small trade cooperatives. We recognize the efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Labour Organization in their plan to integrate the promotion of cooperatives into their work. Also, key United Nations departments, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department of Public Information, have also embarked on useful and exploratory communication and outreach initiatives.

It is vital that the United Nations entities charged with the responsibility for vulnerable peoples and groups, including women, should find the adoption of effective cooperative strategies useful in discharging their mandates. It is also encouraging that many countries have established national committees for the International Year of Cooperatives, as called for in the resolution.

Nigeria is in the process of establishing such a committee, in accordance with the resolution, and supports all international, regional and subregional initiatives on cooperatives. At the national level in Nigeria, umbrella organizations for cooperatives already exist, including the National Association of Cooperative Credit Unions of Nigeria, which have been mobilized for the activities of the International Year.

Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's transformation agenda is aimed at building an inclusive society where job creation constitutes a major pillar for economic growth, providing cheap and long-term capital for businesses, establishing micro-finance banks, removing barriers to increased productivity, improving the environment for doing business, and therefore aptly encapsulates the key tenets of cooperatives.

Through the operationalization of the presidential committee that he inaugurated in 2010 to devise ways of enhancing Government programmes on job creation and poverty reduction, a 5-billion naira business and development fund was established by the Bank of Industry, in collaboration with the Dangote Foundation, to provide soft loans to entrepreneurs engaged in

micro-, small and medium-scale businesses in the country. The fund will grant entrepreneurs access at an overall single-digit interest rate of 5 per cent and will be utilized for term loans, working capital loans, leasing of industrial or business equipment, trading and allied businesses.

In addition, the President's Administration will continue to support infrastructure for the development of small and growing businesses by boosting the $500-million intervention fund already in place to enable the Bank of Industry and the Nigerian Export-Import Bank to continue to lend at single-digit interest rates, to facilitate the increased access of small businesses to finance, as well as to develop Nigeria's enterprise culture. Enterprise development centres, industrial clusters and job centres are also to be established to collaborate with the small- and medium-scale enterprises development agency of Nigeria and 23 enterprise development centres across the country, and to provide business skills training aimed at improving the managerial capability of entrepreneurs.

At the continental level, the African Confederation of Cooperative Savings and Credit Associations is undertaking the responsibility for promoting and empowering cooperatives across the continent. Such initiatives would benefit not only from this global process, but also from the forthcoming African Heads of State Summit on Cooperatives in Lomé, Togo, in January 2012.

For centuries, farmers and traders in Nigeria have used cooperative societies to promote individual and community development. Farmers regularly pool human and material resources to procure farm inputs, while traders — through a contribution system locally referred to as isusu — operate small-scale savings accounts, especially for raising capital for members in rotation. In recognition of the tradition of Nigerian communities, Government continues to promote and strengthen cooperatives, including by establishing financial loans and credit schemes and by encouraging banks to set aside a portion of their loan portfolios for cooperatives.

The International Year of Cooperatives will provide ample opportunity to further promote and strengthen the traditional practice that seems to come naturally to Nigerians. It will also provide the opportunity, through meetings and conferences, to take advantage of the best practices of other countries and regions, as well as initiatives at the level of the United Nations. It is imperative that we improve the image of cooperatives and strengthen them as modern, responsive and locally-beneficial business models.

Nigeria could not agree more with the Secretary-General's conclusion that cooperatives are rooted in their communities and thereby able to develop enterprises aligned with the social, cultural and economic needs and vision of their communities. Nigeria fully recognizes cooperatives as a basic unit of society and deserving of our unreserved support. We must promote a better understanding of their functions and challenges. Cooperatives, if properly channelled, will contribute immensely to societal well-being and a better world.

Ms. Plaisted (United States of America): The United States fully supports the International Year of Cooperatives. Cooperatives and credit unions play a major role in the United States economy. More than 125 million Americans belong to over 7,000 cooperatives in agriculture and agribusiness, finance, rural electrification, communication, housing, consumer goods and retailing.

Throughout the history of United States cooperatives, state Governments and the federal Government have encouraged cooperation and regulated cooperative enterprise, while recognizing that successful cooperatives are those that serve their members' interests. The result has been a strong, autonomous cooperative movement that plays a major role in the United States economy, with revenues exceeding $230 billion.

In particular, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has 80 years of experience in supporting and implementing cooperative programmes. The USDA Rural Development Cooperative Services Program promotes the understanding and use of the cooperative form of business as a viable organizational option for marketing and distributing products. Cooperatives are a cornerstone of business development in rural communities, whether in the traditional form that provides day care services to rural communities, or in the form of today's new generation of biofuel cooperatives, which lessen our dependence on foreign oil.

Cooperatives provide rural residents with new job opportunities, enhanced educational and health-care services, and products that enable them to compete in

today's global enterprises. The USDA Cooperative Program provides assistance for rural residents interested in forming new cooperatives, administers programmes that fund value-added producer grants and rural cooperative development centres, and provides assistance to small socially-disadvantaged producers.

In addition to our domestic cooperative programmes, the United States also provides international development assistance in partnership with cooperative development organizations, drawing on the experience and expertise of United States cooperatives in economic development programmes. Some of the projects we have supported include creating an international credit union movement with more than 72 million members, building rural electric systems in the Philippines and Bangladesh that serve close to 50 million households, and helping to establish the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited that today is one of the world's most successful fertilizer firms.

The United States is happy to participate in this launch of the International Year of Cooperatives, which we hope will help raise awareness of the benefits of cooperatives.

Mr. Ivymbaliuk (Ukraine): On this remarkable day to launch the International Year of Cooperatives, it gives me pleasure to convey to all this message of solidarity from the Ukrainian cooperative community. The cooperative movement in my country has a long history, dating back to as early as 1870. Ukraine now enjoys a large and developed cooperative sector that is considered an important factor for economic development and improved livelihoods. The nation's consumer, credit and agricultural cooperatives and the products and services they produce provide significant employment and social benefits. Ukraine's cooperative sector employs nearly 1.7 million people, many in rural areas, and accounts for more than $125 million in budget revenues.

I cannot fail to mention the numerous Ukrainian cooperative credit unions — here in the United States of America and in Canada, Argentina, Brazil and many other countries — that have united millions of Ukrainians and demonstrated great success even under the difficult conditions resulting from the global economic and financial crisis.

The cooperative unions and the Government of Ukraine have recognized the importance of the International Year of Cooperatives and plan to actively support the initiative. It will provide us with an opportunity to spread cooperative values and principles at the local and national level. In accordance with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 65/184 on cooperatives in social development, the cooperative unions of Ukraine have launched preparations to draft a programme to promote the cooperative movement, to be submitted to the President of Ukraine.

In honour of the International Year, cooperative unions and executive authorities are considering plans for promotional and publicity events to increase awareness of the contribution of cooperatives to employment generation and to socio-economic development. Those will include an official observance ceremony, a scientific conference on the cooperative movement in Ukraine, a media campaign, various exhibitions and junior contests, as well as cooperative charity initiatives to support vulnerable groups of the population.

As we move into the International Year, the Central Consumer Union of Ukraine will seek to better integrate into the world cooperative community, including by applying for membership in the European Community of Consumer Cooperatives.

In this International Year of Cooperatives, we must seize the momentum in order to promote the central idea behind the cooperative movement, namely, to better address the needs of humanity and build a better world. For its part, Ukraine will actively endeavour, along with other Member States, to give concrete substance to the spirit of the International Year of Cooperatives. We believe in the success of the cooperative model in our country and throughout the world. That model should be supported by Governments, international organizations and, what matters most, by the daily dedicated work of every member of the world cooperative community.

Mr. Orozco (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to speak in this important forum to acknowledge the United Nations for having declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. I think this is a good time and a special opportunity to commemorate and recognize the pioneers of the cooperative movement. I do not know if they ever imagined that one day we would be speaking here and remembering them, because there are nearly 1 billion cooperative

members around the world, and that is extremely important.

The delegation of Guatemala is also honoured to be participating in this meeting of the General Assembly to acknowledge and pay tribute and to say that this is an opportunity and a challenge for all members of cooperatives around the world, particularly Guatemala. In this recognition by the United Nations we see a challenge and an opportunity to continue with our work in our countries and communities and all over the world. We are also honoured to recognize our representative in the Organization, Mr. Gert Rosenthal, who had the honour of co-sponsoring the original resolution 64/136 on this topic on behalf of our country.

Guatemala also feels that we are here recognizing the work that cooperative members have accomplished, particularly in recent years. It has not been easy. At times we have been misunderstood, particularly during the armed confrontation, but thanks also to this Organization, we have been able to advance Guatemalan society. In Guatemala, there are more than 1.3 million cooperative members, representing 5 million Guatemalans, and we are honoured that the cooperative movement, through its association and philosophy, has given us the opportunity to develop and to foster our families' and our country's well-being. We would like to state that we in Guatemala are also honoured by the fact that of our 1.3 million cooperative members, 43 per cent are women, a fact of which we are proud. This is also in line with the resolution adopted by the United Nations, which recognizes that the cooperative movement has the potential to include every stakeholder of all various kinds.

In our country, little by little and year by year, we are changing our traditional ways of doing things, and in cooperatives we are now seeing men, women, the elderly, and indigenous and non-indigenous people. We have been able to show that through our cooperative enterprises we have been able to pool our efforts and resources and to demonstrate that these can compete with other types of enterprise, which we respect. We have become the best coffee producers, and we are now the main exporter and national producer of coffee in Guatemala. Thanks to the cooperative organization, we have been able to begin producing cardamom and are now the main producer of organic cardamom. We have also been able to give close attention to the environment and in the last 15 years have planted 30 million trees, another element in line with this meeting's concerns. No other institution, enterprise or Government entity in Guatemala has achieved what we have been able to do with regard to the environment.

We have been able to develop the capacity to enter new areas of activity for developing our companies. A little more than 10 years ago we decided to move into banking, and, together with other sectors — rural women, Mayan groups, small companies, and the Government, as a shareholder — we created the Rural Development Bank. We can now state that we are the largest bank in the country and the ninth in the Central American region. We are democratizing the banking economy in rural areas through our cooperatives, and with more than 900 agencies, we are now in every community — in mountains and in huts, all these people can get to a bank, but a bank with a human face.

We have thus shown our country and the world that improvements can be made. Every day we are becoming more inclusive. Our distribution of wealth is also developing horizontally, unlike the wealth distribution that we have experienced in earlier years, and the cooperative organization is a testament to this. We in Guatemala are not angry, because we are busy working, because we genuinely have a socially responsible economy. That is why we feel so inspired by the content and message of this declaration.

In conclusion, let me say that this is what we have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate in our cooperative organizations and in our country. We are also working very hard to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We would like, therefore, to thank President Al-Nasser for this important declaration, but most importantly for having convened this plenary meeting to launch the international year, which is why we are working together with so many cooperators throughout the world and are happy to be here at this event on behalf of all those who were not able to make the trip.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): The General Assembly declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives in its resolution 64/136. Mandated by the General Assembly, the global launch of the International Year of Cooperatives aims to increase public awareness about cooperatives and their contributions to socio-economic development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as to

promote the formation and growth of cooperatives worldwide.

With the theme "Cooperative enterprises build a better world", the Year seeks to encourage the growth and establishment of cooperatives all over the world, highlighting the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development, particularly their impact on poverty reduction, youth, ageing, disabled persons and family.

It is undeniable that broader livelihood and ecological changes have taken place in the world community following disruptions in the food chain and energy security; we must also not forget the threats of climate change. In a different arena, we also have an emerging generation that relies on social media in an essential way. Young people collaborate with one another through social media. They are temperamentally predisposed toward working together and connecting with one another, two aspects of cooperation that are essential to our goals. By combining those two factors, the International Year of Cooperatives is a well-timed event that represents the depth of understanding of the entire cooperative movement.

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen stands as one of the achievements of contemporary international governance. That meeting brought Governments together to reach a consensus on the need to put people at the centre of development. It recognized, among other things, that national development and the development of the intrinsic value of people as a whole and that individuals as the components of that whole were interrelated, mutually dependent and absolutely necessary. The follow-up to that summit, the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly in 2000, further expanded perspectives on the protection and promotion of social development and provided specific targets and strategies for setting and achieving social development objectives.

While there has been some progress in implementing the goals agreed on at the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, such achievements still remain hostage to the contemporary instability in global and national financial markets, as well as to challenges caused by the fuel and food crises. Those challenges delay, and at times derail, the main policy efforts of national Governments, which are needed to achieve long-lasting social development, economic growth, employment generation and increased productivity. In addition, the free-for-all of the liberalization of the financial sector has not been accompanied by the requisite safeguards of corporate and market responsibility and discipline.

The purpose of development is to create a favourable environment so that people can enjoy healthy, safe and creative lives. Pure development cannot guarantee social harmony in a pluralistic society like Malaysia. Our national development has always emphasized growth with equity. Malaysia believes that importance should be given to programmes that will improve the population's quality of life by providing essential social services, such as primary health care and various types of financial assistance. As it has in the past, the Government will continue to sequence a mix of economic and social policies to ensure that economies and social goals are met simultaneously.

Allow me now to touch on questions relating to youth, ageing, and disabled persons. The social agenda of Malaysia's national policies, through the nation's New Economic Policy, make both implicit and direct reference to the creation of a "caring society". Malaysia believes that the success of a nation is reflected not only in economic terms but more importantly in social development. There seem to be great difficulties in determining the right formula for a nation's success, particularly in the social sector. However, since its independence, Malaysia has been active in developing and prescribing policies that provide various goods and services to its people, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, family and youth, enabling them to take advantage of and share in the wealth and prosperity of the nation.

There are 12.5 million Malaysian young people, accounting for about 43 per cent of the population. In terms of structures, mechanisms, policies and plans, the Government of Malaysia ensures a full range of necessary support systems to guarantee youth participation and empowerment at all levels. The Government continues to engage with the younger generation through nationwide events. For example, in May 2011, when National Youth Day was celebrated to honour the youth of the country, Putrajaya, which houses the Federal Government Administrative Centre, turned into a sea of young people. The celebration included a youth convention that discussed future

avenues for the transformation of youth. Putrajaya has also been officially declared as a youth-friendly city.

With respect to ageing, although the proportion of our population characterized as "older persons" is not currently as high as in some developed countries, Malaysia has a rapidly ageing population. Older persons constituted 4.3 per cent or 1.2 million of the total population in 2005. This number is expected to grow to 3.3 million, or 9.8 per cent of the population, by the year 2020.

Realizing the socio-economic implications of an ageing population, the Government of Malaysia has taken proactive steps to improve the status of older persons. A new national policy and a plan of action for older persons are also expected to be implemented by the end of 2011. There are various strategies and improvements included in the new policy and plan that will meet the current and future needs of the ageing population.

With regard to the social development issues that affect persons with disabilities, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, which was passed by Parliament in December 2007, came into force on 7 July 2008. That Act provides for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and well-being of persons with disabilities, the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and for related matters. The act aims to ensure that the rights, interests and welfare of persons with disabilities are protected. In addition, the Act is also intended to assist persons with disabilities in seeking a better life and to enable them to contribute to national development.

Malaysia believes that it is important to promote healthy families through information on health and disease prevention, family planning, nutrition and child development programmes, as well as by teaching parenting skills, which include child upbringing and discipline, interaction and communication between parents and children, and improving self-esteem. In addition to promoting intellectual and emotional development, programmes aimed at developing family members who are confident, responsible, considerate, hardworking and dedicated are vital to the family.

People are the core and the key to development. Investment in people's well-being is equivalent to investing in the future well-being of all societies, and in progress and peace. This is the time to empower and strengthen the family, youth, the elderly and the disabled to address future challenges.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): As one of the regular sponsors of the Third Committee draft resolution on cooperatives, it is a pleasure for my delegation to speak at today's plenary meeting devoted to the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012. The history of cooperatives in our part of the world dates back to the British colonial period. Starting its journey in 1904 with the aim of raising agricultural production and rural economic advancement through production and processing services, the cooperative movement has expanded into other sectors of the economy, such as fisheries, dairy, housing, microfinance and the service sector. Over the years, the movement has evolved to become a tool for social transformation.

The success of agricultural cooperatives following our independence in 1971 was possible because of the patronage of the Government of Bangladesh. Cooperative ownership and State patronage of it were enshrined in our Constitution. The Constitution mandates cooperatives as one of the three modes of ownership — public, cooperative and private.

Since 1972, two systems of cooperatives have been practiced in Bangladesh — traditional cooperatives, under the Department of Cooperatives, and two-tier cooperatives under the Integrated Rural Development Programme, later institutionalized in the Bangladesh Rural Development Board. The cooperatives under the Programme followed the Comilla Model, which is a time-tested model. Huge investments were made in both systems. Consequently, cooperative societies increased phenomenally. As of June 2009, the number of primary cooperative societies stood at 163,000 and the number of members of those societies was around 8.5 million. The working capital of those societies was BDT 19.09 billion, which is equivalent to $260 million.

At the same time, there were 21 national cooperative societies and 1,107 central cooperative societies. For example, Milk Vita, the trade name of the Bangladesh Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Limited, one of the major national cooperatives of Bangladesh, known for providing quality dairy products, is a successful example of small-scale cooperative milk production.

Within the Government structure, we have a separate Department of Cooperatives, under the

Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. To ensure maximum penetration, we have cooperative offices up to the subdistrict level. To celebrate the International Year of Cooperatives, we have already designated a focal point in the Ministry.

In conclusion, I would like to report that the Government of Bangladesh is now working on the formulation of its National Cooperatives Policy 2011. In Bangladesh, every year, the first Saturday of the month of November is observed as National Cooperative Day. We recognize that cooperatives present opportunities in social awareness-building, entrepreneurship development and community-based programmes and activities. Hence, the launching of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012 will give us an opportunity to take stock of our successes and failures and to chalk out a future course of action, because we believe that our ultimate goal of eradication of poverty is closely tied to the success of our cooperatives.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Having followed our work throughout the day, I would like to offer a short summary of our deliberations.

(*spoke in English*)

Today's events have underscored the unquestionable importance of the year ahead, the International Year of Cooperatives. Our speakers this morning reinforced the urgent importance of the cooperative enterprise model and its potential to drive forward sustainable development. As speakers have stressed all day, the model itself is one that arose as a response to crises and hardship, not unlike those that we are experiencing today, and it has proven successful in curtailing the detrimental impacts of those crises. We have often overlooked it, however, in exploring and devising pathways to productive, inclusive, sustainable societies.

We were very inspired by the statements made by the President of the General Assembly, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and Cooperative Representative Dame Pauline Green, the powerful statement by His Excellency Mr. Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and by the comprehensive presentation given by Mrs. Viola Onwuliri, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria. We have all — the speakers I have mentioned along with those from the Member States — highlighted the contribution of cooperatives to sustainable development as a model of economic organization fostering poverty reduction, employment generation and social inclusion and integration. We have also stressed the importance of partnership with Governments. The strong cooperative movement is an integral part of developmental progress, and it can contribute significantly to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The 2012 International Year of Cooperatives presents an opportunity to advance a vision of sustainable development that is both viable and responsible and that can contribute to the democratization of the world economy. Many States already have in place or are preparing to put in place national committees, as suggested in resolution 64/136. Many actions have been outlined, including the forthcoming summit of African Heads of State on cooperatives to be held in Lome in January 2012.

Today we are kick-starting a process of worldwide action to ensure that the International Year of Cooperatives meets its objectives. We have spoken today of building the capacity of cooperatives to compete in an increasingly globalized economy and of leveraging their potential for employment generation and inclusive development, while ensuring their autonomy and recognizing their different legal and regulatory needs.

By raising our citizens' awareness of the benefits that cooperatives offer to improve their livelihoods and by working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the fair participation of cooperative enterprises in our economic system, we are at once bolstering our economic capacity and empowering communities. I thank all who have spoken today for their contributions, and I look forward to the events that the International Year of Collectives will bring. As we work together with and for cooperatives, we truly will build a better world.

(*spoke in French*)

The plenary meeting devoted to the launch of the year 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives is now concluded.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 27.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.